

Building Healthy Relationships



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Healthy Relationships:

<http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/healthyrelationships.html>

Building a Healthy Relationship from the Start

The Beginning Stages

While the early months of a relationship can feel effortless and exciting, successful long-term relationships involve ongoing effort and compromise by both partners. Building healthy patterns early in your relationship can establish a solid foundation for the long run. When you are just starting a relationship, it is important to:

- **Build.** Build a foundation of appreciation and respect. Focus on all the considerate things your partner says and does. Happy couples make a point of noticing even small opportunities to say "thank you" to their partner, rather than focusing on mistakes their partner has made.
- **Explore.** Explore each other's interests so that you have a long list of things to enjoy together. Try new things together to expand mutual interests.
- **Establish.** Establish a pattern of apologizing if you make a mistake or hurt your partner's feelings. Saying "I'm sorry" may be hard in the moment, but it goes a long way towards healing a rift in a relationship. Your partner will trust you more if he or she knows that you will take responsibility for your words and actions.

As the Months Go By: Important Things to Recognize as Your Relationship Grows

Relationships Change. Changes in life outside your relationship will impact what you want and need from the relationship. Since change is inevitable, welcoming it as an opportunity to enhance the relationship is more fruitful than trying to keep it from happening.

Check in Periodically. Occasionally set aside time to check in with each other on changing expectations and goals. If a couple ignores difficult topics for too long, their relationship is likely to drift into rocky waters without their noticing.

What to Do When Conflict Arises

Disagreements in a relationship are not only normal but, if constructively resolved, actually strengthen the relationship. It is inevitable that there will be times of sadness, tension, or outright anger between you and your partner. The source of these problems may lie in unrealistic/unreasonable demands, unexplored expectations, or unresolved issues/behaviors in one partner or in the relationship. Resolving conflicts requires honesty, a willingness to consider your partner's perspective even if you don't fully understand it, and lots of communication.

Healthy communication is critical, especially when there are important decisions regarding sex, career, marriage, and family to be made. The following are some guidelines for successful communication and conflict resolution.

- **Understand Each Other's Family Patterns.** Find out how conflicts were managed (or not managed) in your partner's family, and talk about how conflict was approached (or avoided) in your own family. It is not unusual for couples to discover that their families had different ways of expressing anger and resolving differences. If your family wasn't good at communicating or resolving conflict constructively, give yourself permission to try out some new ways of handling conflict.
- **Timing Counts.** Contrary to previous notions, the best time to resolve a conflict may not be immediately. It is not unusual for one or both partners to need some time to cool off. This "time-out" period can help you avoid saying or doing hurtful things in the heat of the moment, and can help partners more clearly identify what changes are most important. Remember - if you are angry with your partner but don't know what you want yet, it will be nearly impossible for your partner to figure it out!
- **Establish an Atmosphere of Emotional Support.** Emotional support involves accepting your partner's differences and not insisting that he or she meet your needs only in the precise way that you want them met. Find out how your partner shows his or her love for you, and don't set absolute criteria that require your partner to always behave differently before you're satisfied.
- **Agree to Disagree and Move On.** Most couples will encounter some issues upon which they will never completely agree. Rather than continuing a cycle of repeated fights, agree to disagree and negotiate a compromise or find a way to work around the issue.
- **Distinguish between things you want versus things you need from your partner.** For example, for safety reasons, you might need your partner to remember to pick you up on time after dark. But calling you several times a day may really only be a "want."
- **Clarify Your Messages.** A clear message involves a respectful but direct expression of your wants and needs. Take some time to identify what you really want before talking to your partner. Work on being able to describe your request in clear, observable terms. For example, you might say, "I would like you to hold my hand more often" rather than the vague, "I wish you were more affectionate."
- **Discuss One Thing at a Time.** It can be tempting to list your concerns or grievances, but doing so will likely prolong an argument. Do your best to keep the focus on resolving one concern at a time.
- **Really Listen.** Being a good listener requires the following: (a) don't interrupt, (b) focus on what your partner is saying rather than on formulating your own response, and (c) check out what you heard your partner say. You might start this process with: "I think you are saying..." Or "what I understood you to say was..." This step alone can prevent misunderstandings that might otherwise develop into a fight.
- **Restrain Yourself.** Research has found that couples who "edit" themselves and do not say all the angry things they may be thinking are typically the happiest.
- **Adopt a "Win-Win" Position.** A "win-win" stance means that your goal is for the relationship, rather than for either partner, to "win" in a conflict situation. Ask yourself: "Is what I am about to say (or do) going to increase or decrease the odds that we'll work this problem out?"

Healthy and Problematic Expectations in Relationships

Each of us enters into romantic relationships with ideas about what we want based on family relationships, what we've seen in the media, and our own past relationship experiences. Holding on to unrealistic expectations can cause a relationship to be unsatisfying and to eventually fail. The following will help you to distinguish between healthy and problematic relationship expectations:

- **Respect Changes.** What you want from a relationship in the early months of dating may be quite different from what you want after you have been together for some time. Anticipate that both you and your partner will change over time. Feelings of love and passion change with time, as well. Respecting and valuing these changes is healthy. Love literally changes brain chemistry for the first months of a relationship. For both physiological and emotional reasons, an established relationship will have a more complex and often richer type of passion than a new relationship.
- **Accept Differences.** It is difficult, but healthy, to accept that there are some things about our partners that will not change over time, no matter how much we want them to. Unfortunately, there is often an expectation that our partner will change only in the ways we want. We may also hold the unrealistic expectation that our partner will never change from the way he or she is now.
- **Express Wants and Needs.** While it is easy to assume that your partner knows your wants and needs, this is often not the case and can be the source of much stress in relationships. A healthier approach is to directly express our needs and wishes to our partner.
- **Respect Your Partner's Rights.** In healthy relationships, there is respect for each partner's right to have her/his own feelings, friends, activities, and opinions. It is unrealistic to expect or demand that that he or she have the same priorities, goals, and interests as you.
- **Be Prepared to "Fight Fair."** Couples who view conflict as a threat to the relationship, and something to be avoided at all costs, often find that accumulated and unaddressed conflicts are the real threat. Healthy couples fight, but they "fight fair" - accepting responsibility for their part in a problem, admitting when they are wrong, and seeking compromise. Additional information about fair fighting can be found here.
- **Maintain the Relationship.** Most of us know that keeping a vehicle moving in the desired direction requires not only regular refueling, but also ongoing maintenance and active corrections to the steering to compensate for changes in the road. A similar situation applies to continuing relationships. While we may work hard to get the relationship started, expecting to cruise without effort or active maintenance typically leads the relationship to stall or crash! Though gifts and getaways are important, it is often the small, nonmaterial things that partners routinely do for each other that keep the relationship satisfying.

Outside Pressures on the Relationship

Differences in Background. Even partners coming from very similar cultural, religious, or economic backgrounds can benefit from discussing their expectations of how a good boyfriend, girlfriend, or spouse behaves. What seems obvious or normal to you may surprise your partner, and vice versa. If you are from different backgrounds, be aware that you may need to spend

more time and energy to build your relationship. Take the time to learn about your partner's culture or religion, being careful to check out what parts of such information actually fit for your partner.

Time Together and Apart. How much time you spend together and apart is a common relationship concern. If you interpret your partner's time apart from you as, "he or she doesn't care for me as much as I care for him or her," you may be headed for trouble by jumping to conclusions. Check out with your partner what time alone means to him or her, and share your feelings about what you need from the relationship in terms of time together. Demanding what you want, regardless of your partner's needs, usually ends up driving your partner away, so work on reaching a compromise.

Your Partner's Family. For many people, families remain an important source of emotional, if not financial, support during their years at the university. Some people find dealing with their partner's family difficult or frustrating. It can help to take a step back and think about parental good intentions. Families may offer well-intentioned advice about your relationship or your partner. It's important that the two of you discuss and agree on how you want to respond to differing family values and support one another in the face of what can be very intense "suggestions" from family.

Friends. There are some people who seem to believe that "I have to give up all my friends unless my partner likes them as much as I do." Giving up friends is not healthy for you or the relationship, except in circumstances where your friends pressure you to participate in activities that are damaging to yourself and the relationship. At the same time, keep in mind that your partner may not enjoy your friends as much as you do. Negotiate which friends you and your partner spend time with together. You might ask: "Which of my friends do you enjoy seeing and which ones would you rather I see alone or at other times when I'm not with you?"

Eight Basic Steps to Maintaining a Good Relationship

1. Be aware of what you and your partner want for yourselves and what you want from the relationship.
2. Let one another know what your needs are.
3. Realize that your partner will not be able to meet all your needs. Some of these needs will have to be met outside of the relationship.
4. Be willing to negotiate and compromise on the things you want from one another.
5. Do not demand that a partner change to meet all your expectations. Work to accept the differences between your ideal mate and the real person you are dating.
6. Try to see things from the other's point of view. This doesn't mean that you must agree with one another all the time, but rather that both of you can understand and respect each other's differences, points of view, and separate needs.

7. Where critical differences do exist in your expectations, needs, or opinions, try to work honestly and sincerely to negotiate. Seek professional help early rather than waiting until the situation becomes critical.
8. Do your best to treat your partner in a way that says, "I love you and trust you, and I want to work this out."

Relationship Issues and Counseling

If you are feeling distressed about a relationship, you may wish to consider individual or couples counseling. Counseling can help you identify problematic patterns in your current relationship and teach you more effective ways of relating. If you are grappling with a relationship problem and would like some help, we encourage you to contact local counseling services.

Fair Fighting: Ground rules

Remain calm. Try not to overreact to difficult situations. By remaining calm it is more likely that others will consider your viewpoint.

Express feelings in words, not actions. If you start to feel so angry or upset that you feel you may lose control, take a "time out" and do something to help yourself feel calm: take a walk, do some deep breathing, play with the dog, write in your journal- whatever works for you.

Be specific about what is bothering you. Vague complaints are hard to work on.

Deal with only one issue at a time. Don't introduce other topics until each is fully discussed. This avoids the "kitchen sink" effect where people throw in all their complaints while not allowing anything to be resolved.

No hitting below the belt. Attacking areas of personal sensitivity creates an atmosphere of distrust, anger, and vulnerability.

Avoid accusations. Accusations will lead others to focus on defending themselves rather than on understanding you. Instead, talk about how someone's actions made you feel.

Try not to generalize. Avoid words like "never" or "always." Such generalizations are usually inaccurate and will heighten tensions.

Avoid make believe. Exaggerating or inventing a complaint - or your feelings about it - will prevent the real issues from surfacing. Stick with the facts and your honest feelings.

Don't stockpile. Storing up lots of grievances and hurt feelings over time is counterproductive. It's almost impossible to deal with numerous old problems for which recollections may differ. Try to deal

with problems as they arise.

Avoid clamming up. Positive results can only be attained with two-way communication. When one person becomes silent and stops responding to the other, frustration and anger can result. However, if you feel yourself getting overwhelmed or shutting down, you may need to take a break from the discussion. Just let your partner know you will return to the conversation as soon as you are able and then don't forget to follow-up.

Establish common ground rules. You may even want to ask your partner-in-conflict to read and discuss this information with you. When both people accept positive common ground rules for managing a conflict, resolution becomes much more likely.

Fair Fighting: Step by Step...

1. Before you begin, ask yourself, "What exactly is bothering me? What do I want the other person to do or not do? Are my feelings in proportion to the issue?"
2. Know what your goals are before you begin. What are the possible outcomes that could be acceptable to you?
3. Remember that the idea is not to win but to come to a mutually satisfying solution to the problem.
4. Set a time for a discussion with your partner-in-conflict. It should be as soon as possible but agreeable to both persons. Springing a conversation on someone when they are unprepared may leave them feeling like they have to fend off an attack. If you encounter resistance to setting a time, try to help the other person see that the problem is important to you.
5. State the problem clearly. At first, try to stick to the facts; then, once you've stated the facts, state your feelings. Use "I" messages to describe feelings of anger, hurt, or disappointment. Avoid "you" messages such as, "you make me angry...."; instead, try something like, "I feel angry when you...."
6. Invite the other person to share his or her point of view. Be careful not to interrupt, and genuinely try to hear his or her concerns and feelings. Try to restate what you heard in a way that lets your partner know you fully understood, and ask your partner to do the same for you.
7. Try to take the other's perspective; that is, try to see the problem through his or her eyes. The opposing viewpoint can make sense to you, even if you don't agree with it.
8. Propose specific solutions, and invite the other person to propose solutions, too.
9. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each proposal.
10. Be willing to compromise. Allowing the other person only one option will make it difficult to resolve the concern. When you reach an agreement on a way forward, celebrate! Decide together on a time to check-in, discuss how things are working, and make changes to your agreement if necessary. If no solution has been reached regarding the original problem, schedule a time to revisit the issue and continue the discussion.

When Nothing Seems to Work

Sometimes, despite our best fair-fighting efforts, a disagreement or conflict seems insurmountable. When this occurs, talking with a trained professional can help. A trained mediator can help you communicate more effectively and eventually work your way through to a solution.

Recommended Reading

The Dance of Anger: A Woman's Guide to Changing the Patterns of Intimate Relationships **by Harriet Lerner. HarperCollins, 1997.**

Messages: The Communication Book **by Matthew McKay, Martha Davis, and Patrick Fanning. New Harbinger Publications, 1995.**

Love is Never Enough: How Couples Can Overcome Misunderstandings, Resolve Conflicts, and Solve Relational Problems Through Cognitive Therapy **by Aaron T. Beck. Harper Perennial, 1989.**

Dating Bill of Rights

In Dating Relationships, I Have the Responsibility

- To communicate my values and limits
- To respect my romantic partner's limits, values, feelings, and privacy
- To accept my romantic partner's culture and identities
- To not abuse - physically, sexually, or emotionally
- To listen
- To be considerate
- To communicate clearly, honestly, and respectfully
- To give my romantic partner space to enjoy activities and friendships outside of our relationship
- To not exert power or control in relationships
- To compromise when needed
- To admit to being wrong when appropriate
- To ask for help from friends, family and mentors

In Dating Relationships, I Have the Right

- To be treated with respect - always
- To be in a healthy relationship
- To not be abused - physically, sexually or emotionally
- To enjoy friends and activities apart from my romantic partner
- To express myself honestly
- To recognize my culture and identities
- To determine my values and set limits

- To decide what I share with whom
- To say no
- To feel safe in relationships
- To be treated as an equal
- To feel comfortable being myself
- To leave or stay in a relationship

Risk Reduction and Self-Protection

Risk Reduction

Many incidents of sexual violence are unavoidable. More than eighty percent of sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the survivor. Regardless of previous training and preparation, some people will face situations where sexual assault is going to occur. Sexual assault survivors DO NOT share any responsibility for the crime with the offender. With these facts in mind, the following are a few suggestions that could help reduce the risk for a sexual assault. Please know that these suggestions may have to be adjusted according to the person's culture and/or the specific situation. The bottom line in all of these situations is to trust your instincts.

Predatory Drugs

Predatory drugs are those drugs that may be used by one person to "prey" upon an unsuspecting victim. They include (but are not limited to) drugs such as Rohypnol, Ketamine, and GHB that are usually slipped into the victim's drink without her/his knowledge by a predator who plans to capitalize on the drug's properties to commit a sexual assault. Because these drugs often result in some level of amnesia, the victim frequently has little to no memory of what happened and who is responsible for the crime. Alcohol, in and of itself, may also be a predatory drug and is the substance most often used to commit sexual assault.

What can you do to protect yourself?

(The following recommendations come from The Bacchus Network brochure, "Predatory Drugs," 2006)

- Don't leave your drink unattended at the table or bar while you are dancing, talking with friends, or in the bathroom, etc.
- Only drink from un-opened bottles or cans, or drinks that you've seen poured.
- Avoid "group" drinks. Punch bowls, or containers that are "passed around," are the easiest to drug.
- If you notice something is wrong with your drink - there seems to be some powder on the glass or it has a funny taste (esp. salty or bitter) - throw it away immediately.
- If you suddenly feel really tired or really drunk and you don't know why because you haven't had that much to drink, you may be feeling the effects of a drug.

- Tell someone you trust immediately. The key is to get to a safe place. Tell someone what you think has happened to you, and tell them that you need their help or medical attention.
- Watch each other's drinks. If someone gets up and leaves and can't take their drink, keep an eye on it for them.
- If your friend looks drunk or ready to pass out, don't assume "everything will be OK." Check to see if they are all right.
- If you came together, leave together. **Don't leave a friend behind.** If someone tells you, "She's upstairs sleeping, don't worry about it," go find out. Don't leave without someone unless you know for sure.
- If you see someone dosing someone's drink, or hear about a "drugged" punch bowl, confront the behavior. Warn the people they are trying to drug. Later, turn the predator in to public safety, student affairs or law enforcement.

50 Characteristics of Healthy Relationships

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/in-practice/201301/50-characteristics-healthy-relationships>

A list of 50 positive signs you're in a healthy relationship.

Published on January 22, 2013 by [Alice Boyes, Ph.D.](#) in [In Practice](#)

If you can say yes to most of these, it's very likely you're in a healthy relationship.

50 Positive Characteristics of Healthy Relationships.

1. You can name your partner's best friend and state a positive quality that person has.
2. You and your partner are playful with each other.
3. You think your partner has good ideas.
4. You'd like to become more like your partner in some ways.
5. Even when you disagree, you can acknowledge your partner makes sensible points.
6. You think about each other when you're not physically together.
7. You see your partner as trustworthy.

8. In relationship-relevant areas (such as warmth and attractiveness), you view your partner a little bit more positively than s/he views themselves or how most other people view your partner.
9. You enjoy the ways your partner has changed and grown since you met.
10. Your partner is enthusiastic when something “goes right” for you.
11. (If applicable) When you reunite at the end of the day, you say something positive before you say something negative.
12. You reminisce about positive experiences you had together in the past (e.g., fun vacations).
13. You can name one of your partner’s favorite books
14. You know what your partner’s aspirations in life are.
15. You can recall something you did together that was new and challenging for both of you.
16. You kiss everyday
17. You’re comfortable telling your partner about things that make you feel vulnerable (such as if you’re worried about getting laid off).
18. You have your own “love language” e.g., pet names or special signs you give each other (such as the Obamas’ fist bump).
19. You know what your partner’s most embarrassing moment from [childhood](#) was.
20. You know what your partner’s proudest moment from childhood was.
21. You never or very rarely express contempt for your partner - roll your eyes, cuss at them, call them crazy etc.
22. You can list some positive [personality](#) qualities your partner inherited from their [parents](#).
23. (If you have children together) You can list some positive personality qualities your partner has passed on to your children.
24. You enjoy supporting your partner’s exploration of their personal [goals](#) and [dreams](#), even when this involves you staying home.

25. You have a sense of security. You're confident your partner wouldn't cheat or do something to jeopardize your combined financial security.
26. When you argue, you have a sense that your partner cares about your feelings and opinions.
27. Your partner lets you into their inner emotional world. They make their thoughts and feelings accessible to you.
28. You frequently express appreciation for each other.
29. You frequently express admiration for each other.
30. You feel a sense of being teammates with your partner.
31. You know your partner's favorite song.
32. You have a sense that your individual strengths complement each other.
33. (If applicable) When you say goodbye in the mornings, it's mindful and affectionate.
34. If you've told your partner about any [trauma](#) you've experienced, they've reacted kindly.
35. You don't flat out refuse to talk about topics that are important to your partner.
36. You respect your partner's other relationships (with family, friends etc.) and view them as important.
37. You have fun together.
38. You see your partner's flaws and weaknesses in specific ways rather than general ways (e.g., you get annoyed about them forgetting to pick up the towels but you don't generally see them as unreliable or inconsiderate).
39. You're receptive to being influenced by your partner - you'll try their suggestions.
40. You're physically affectionate with each other.
41. You enjoy spending time together.
42. You feel a zing when you think about how you first met.

- 43. You can name your partner's favorite relative.
- 44. You can name your partner's most beloved childhood pet.
- 45. You can articulate what your partner sees as the recipe for [happiness](#).
- 46. When you feel stressed or upset, you turn toward your partner for comfort rather than turning away from your partner and trying to deal with it yourself.
- 47. You have a sense that it's easy to get your partner's attention if you've got something important to say.
- 48. You like exploring your partner's body.
- 49. You can name your partner's favorite food.
- 50. If you could only take one person to a deserted island, you'd take your partner.

10 Ways Healthy Relationships Help Individuals Grow

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/in-practice/201206/10-ways-relationships-help-individuals-grow>

1. Your partner sees you more positively than you see yourself.

Over time, you incorporate these more positive perceptions into your self-view. You get an expanded sense of your positive attributes or talents.

For example, your partner thinks you're smarter or nicer than you believe you are, and eventually you come to believe they're right. This leads to you behaving more confidently, which in turn has rewards for you.

Or, you've always been insecure about your big bum and covered it with loose clothing, but your partner helps you realize that even though it's big, it's very attractive.

2. Your partner introduces you to things you like. You get new opportunities for pleasure experiences and an expanded sense of self.

For example, your partner enjoys bicycle camping. You never would have tried this if it wasn't for your partner's influence.

Or, you never would have considered watching *Battlestar Galactica* but your partner loves it, so you try watching it. You realize you like genre TV that previously you wouldn't have considered, and this opens up new pleasure experiences and an expanded sense of self.

3. Your partner's good habits rub off on you. Health, finance, lifestyle, or psychological habits.

For example, health-related habits. Anything from flossing to jogging to taking [medication](#) appropriately when you have pain rather than just putting up with it.

Or, finance-related habits like your partner has a retirement savings plan so you get one. Or, lifestyle habits, like taking weekends off. Or psychological habits, like not personalizing things that may not be personal.

4. Your partner encourages you to be yourself.

For example, you love singing. You sing all the time at home and your partner encourages you to sing in a concert.

Or, you're a very fun person. You love to joke. Your partner also loves to joke, or just likes your joking and sense of fun and supports you expressing this positive aspect of yourself.

5. Your relationship provides practical support that allows you to pursue your personal [goals](#).

For example, you can start a business because you can rely on your partner's income while you're getting your business going.

6. Your relationship provides emotional support that helps you persist with hard things.

For example, while you're at graduate school, looking for a job, or starting a business. On days when you're feeling disappointed or demoralized, you can come home to a hug.

7. Your relationship helps you learn to trust that another person will be dependable and emotionally available to you.

For example, you start out being very worried your partner is going to abandon you, but over time you realize this doesn't happen.

8. Your relationship helps you learn to trust that you're an emotionally dependable person.

You might doubt your own capacity to be a reliable support to another person, but over time you realize you're emotionally dependable. You grow because you learn you have the capacity to emotionally support your partner.

9. Your relationship helps you with self-acceptance.

You learn to take emotional risks with your partner. You tell them about things you're anxious or ashamed about. They still love you and this helps with self-acceptance. For people who worry that they're unlovable, a good relationship can prove this wrong.

10. Your partner doesn't tolerate your negative patterns and so you change in positive ways.

For example, your partner doesn't tolerate you being excessively dramatic. You learn there is no benefit to this. You stop for the sake of the relationship but it also helps you.

Or, your partner doesn't tolerate racist or homophobic statements. They call you on these things and you change for the better.

Self-Reflection

If you enjoy self-reflection, try writing an example from your own relationship that fits into each of the above ten categories.

21 First Date Ideas

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/in-practice/201312/21-first-date-ideas>

How to think beyond dinner and a movie in planning a first date.

Published on December 31, 2013 by [Alice Boyes, Ph.D.](#) in [In Practice](#)

Sometimes it's hard to come up with novel and interesting first date ideas. To help you out, I polled a group of my expert colleagues for their ideas. They're all fellow bloggers here at Psychology Today.

Here's what they said.

From Art Markman, Author of [Smart Thinking](#)

1. First dates need two things—a chance to get to know each other and some energy. So, try to get both involved. First, find a place to walk and talk. A stroll through the streets or in a park is great.

Walks are nice, because even if the conversation falters for a bit, the scenery itself can stand in. If things are going well, then try to find someplace to hear some music. Music is a great source of energy. Plus, you can [learn a lot about someone](#) from the music they like.

From Toni Bernhard, Author of the books *How to Be Sick* and *How to Wake Up*
www.tonibernhard.com

2. Take a cooking class together. Many of the most popular cookware chain stores, such as Sur La Table and Williams-Sonoma, offer these two-three hour classes in the evenings. Sur La Table even has special Date Night classes, with names like: "Tuscany for Two," "Spicy Latin America," "Parisian Romance." Just Google "cooking classes."

3. Go to an aquarium. It a great place to chat and stroll, as you feast your eyes on colorful fish and other sea creatures, some of which are quite comical to look at!

From [Susan Newman, Ph.D.](#), PT Blogger and Author.

4. Don't do lunch, or dinner, or drinks. Center that first date mingling in an [environment](#) that allows you to chat, yet gives you subjects to chat about other than "Where did you go to school?" Consider a local flea or farmer's market, visit a zoo or local park. Go bowling even you can't keep the ball in the alley all the time. Makes for good laughs if conversation stalls.

5. Arrange a date around a gift you need for your mother or sister or dad or brother. Shopping should give you the opinions and some insight into each other's sense of style, feelings about money, and those should lead more answers to the things you want to know in the beginning of what might turn into a long term relationship.

From Barb Markway, Ph.D., PT Blogger, Author, and founder of [the Self-Compassion Project](#).

6. Minimize first date anxiety by doing a fun activity together. Establishing you have one shared interest /passion in common is a great foundation for the start of a relationship. If you each have dogs, why not go to a dog park? Who doesn't love cute animals? There will be plenty to talk about, and probably a lot to [laugh](#) about, as well! Of course, this could get complicated if your dogs don't like each other :)

From Meg Selig, [PT Blogger and Author](#).

7. Here's my best first date idea, and it worked for me: Meet for a quiet coffee. Talk. Allow no more than one hour. Be prepared to be [assertive](#) if you know it won't work out, for example: "I enjoyed meeting you, but I don't think this relationship would work for me. Best of luck to you in your search." Be prepared to hear those words from the other person, too. Save time and money with a screening interview rather than a first date!

Mary Pritchard, [PT Blogger](#) and Author.

8. Rock climbing—doing a physically vigorous activity will make you seem more attractive to your date (and vice versa).

9. Bowling—do a fun activity where you can laugh a lot will show your date that you know how to have a good time.

From Glenn Alperin, a [writer](#) who has [prosopagnosia](#).

10. As a person with a disability which is not entirely obvious to the observer... you need to bring any "deal breakers" out of the closet right away so they can be addressed. It is better to determine if there is any incompatibility before engaging in a longer-term relationship than to find out later that something isn't going to work no matter what.

For me, that means my date would need to be open and accommodating to dealing with my prosopagnosia in a way that allows me to interact with them with relative ease. Compared to others with prosopagnosia, mine is on the more severe side, so not all people with prosopagnosia will agree with me, but my point is more that would be my deal breaker.

If a person isn't willing or potentially able to be accommodating to me in order to make social, let alone potential romantic, situations easier for me to navigate, then it is better I know that right away than waste my time, and theirs, on a relationship that won't work for either of us in the long term.

From [Vinita Mehta, Ph.D.](#)

11. Trivia night—Most quiz nights cover a range of topics, so this will give you a sense of your date's interests and [humor](#). It might also tell you if they are a graceful winner or loser...

12. An amusement park. This may be an ideal date if you're particularly keen on someone—sharing an experience that conjures up physical arousal tends to forge an emotional bond.

From [David Gussak, Ph.D.](#)

13. My response to a positive first date experience ties in beautifully with my own focus on the arts and creative therapies.... If the two people are so inclined, there are wonderful arts activities that are as structured or open-ended as you would want to make it; but, to be creative and engaging, I would recommend going to one of those 'make your own pots' ceramic studios for a first date, or programs like Painting with a Twist, in which it has less to do with making good art, and more to do with socializing while creating. This also helps lower inhibitions in that the two people would be engaged in an activity in which they can focus on,

freeing them up to be more likely to talk to one another with less social awkwardness. It also levels the social playing field.

Of course, personally, I have found that a long bike ride has also been conducive for an initial date—especially one in which a picnic was involved, or a destination where two could dine or 'hang' like the beach, cafe or winery. Two people focusing on the road may make it easier for them to speak to one another, and bike clothes are so ridiculous, it takes the [stress](#) out of 'looking your best.'

From [Katherine Ramsland, Ph.D.](#)

14. Hiring someone to teach a private lesson on some skill or hobby you both agree that you'd like to learn, such as photography or cooking a type of food, or fly fishing. This levels the playing field while engaging in something that both want to do.

15. A historical house tour, where you can both comment on things you like or don't.

From, [Alice Boyes, Ph.D.](#)

17. Give your date a chance to show off their skills.

If your date knows how to do something that you're interested in learning, ask them to give you a lesson. It could be anything from taking fancy SLR photos to expertly navigating a computer game.

18. Express your vitality.

According to research, [vitality](#) is one of the key qualities most people look for in a mate.

Active first dates can work for expressing your vitality. e.g., a short hike to some view with a beautiful view (and a cafe at the top!) Since people are unlikely to want to get sweaty on a first date, I mean something not so strenuous you'd end up sweaty and disheveled.

19. Express your adventurous side.

Adventurousness is another quality that most people look for in a mate. It's one of the [top 18 qualities](#) people desire in a partner. If you're both adventurous eaters, you could try a restaurant with a tasting menu.

You don't want to pick something that will make the other person uncomfortable, since thoughtfulness and considerateness are also among the top desired qualities.

20. Introduce your date to something they'll love.

[One of the ways relationships help individuals grow](#) is that we get introduced to our partner's interests and likes and adopt some of these as our own. For example, if your partner introduces you to Korean food and you discover you love it. It's a bit of a risk that the person won't like what you introduce them to but calculate if you think it's a risk worth taking from what you know about them already.

21 First Date Questions

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/in-practice/201305/21-first-date-questions>

Try these ideas for questions to ask on a first date.

Published on May 4, 2013 by [Alice Boyes, Ph.D.](#) in [In Practice](#)

There aren't hard and fast rules about what's a good vs. bad first date question. Research has shown that the most effective [communication style in relationships](#) is a flexible one. The examples below are intended to stimulate your own ideas rather than as rules.

Key [goals](#) of a first date are to:

(a) See if you have a connection, and

(b) Find out if you and your date have any major areas of incompatibility. We're wired so that once we start to develop an emotional [attachment](#) this is hard to break away from. Find out early if there are reasons that "making it work" will be fraught.

Ideas for First Date Questions.

Select a few of these questions rather than attempt to ask them all on the same first date!

1. What sort of vacations do you like to take?

Why: Different vacation preferences or amounts of vacation time can be a major source of ongoing incompatibility. For example, if one person likes to take very long trips and the other person has a more standard two weeks' vacation time.

2. How was your day?

Why: This question helps establish if your date has a positive or negative attitude? If asking this question leads to five solid minutes of them complaining you'll know the person sees the glass as half empty.

Also, if anything out of the ordinary has happened that might be affecting your date's mood, it's good to factor this in.

3. Tell me about your friends?

Why: When you enter a relationship with someone you're also entering a relationship with their friends. Also, it's nice to give your date an opportunity to answer a question that isn't directly about them.

4. Are you a dog person, a cat person, or neither?

Why: If one of you doesn't like [pets](#) and the other has 3 dogs, that's likely to be a problem.

5. What do you like to do in your free time?

Why: Helps you find out the person's preferences and also helps you establish if the person has any free time or if they're a [workaholic](#).

6. Is there anything you're really passionate about?

Why: Does the person have strong feelings or are they more easygoing and with milder feelings.

7. Do you like your job?

Why: Is the person about to make any major life changes e.g., leave their \$200K/year job to go back to school? What's their attitude to their work? Do they see it as a job, a vocation, or are they primarily motivated by climbing the [career](#) ladder?

8. Are you a morning or a night person?

Why: This is primarily relevant if you're either an extreme night or an extreme morning person.

9. Would you like a bite of my dish?

Why: This question shows you're open to sharing. On a first date go for a friendly tone rather than an intimate tone when asking this question.

10. Is it too noisy in here for you?

Why: This shows you're considerate of other people's comfort. Don't be afraid to change plans if you arrive at a restaurant and find it's too noisy for a good conversation.

11. Who do you live with?

Why: If they still live with their Mom or they live with 10 roommates, this tells you something about how they like to live.

12. Are you close to your family? Or, tell me who's in your family?

Why: Are they very involved with their family of origin? Is this something that appeals to you or not? Are their family intrusive?

Do they have a lot of family conflict?

14. Is there anything you don't eat?

Why: Helps you plan future dates but also gives you an opportunity to choose not to pursue [dating](#) someone who has very incompatible food preferences from you.

15. Do you smoke / drink / do [drugs](#)?

Why: You likely have a preference one way or the other.

16. Do you collect anything?

Why: Do they spend a lot of money or time collecting something?

17. How do you feel about.... [insert the thing you're really passionate about]?

Why: Whatever you're really passionate about, do they respect it? For example, gaming.

18. Have you seen any good movies or TV shows lately?

Why: This will tell you about your date's preferences and also if they're someone who tends to reflect on experiences and can talk about their thoughts. This might not be important to you, but it might be.

19. Have you been to any good restaurants recently?

Why: Tells you something about whether they seek out new experiences.

20. What are your thoughts about the upcoming election (any upcoming election)?

Why: The main point here is not to jump to assumptions about your date's [politics](#). If you jump to an assumption that they have the same politics as you, they might feel too awkward to say that their politics are different.

21. Are you dating anyone else at the moment?

Why: If your date is exploring a relationship with someone else you might want to push pause at the end of your first date but offer them the opportunity to get back in touch with you if the other relationship doesn't work out. This isn't about you being sloppy seconds. Especially in the age of [internet dating](#), people sometimes meet multiple people they're interested in around the same time.

To take some of the pressure off during first dates, remind yourself:

- (a) That you each have 50% of the responsibility for how the conversation flows, and
- (b) You can only control how someone reacts to you to a limited extent. If you try to be too careful with what you say, this is likely to backfire.

The answers to the above questions aren't necessarily deal breakers. However it's good to know what you're getting yourself in for before you start to get attached to someone.

10 Essential Emotion Skills to Look For in a Partner

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/in-practice/201304/10-essential-emotion-skills-look-in-partner>

These are ten [emotion regulation](#) skills to consider when you're deciding if someone will make a good long-term partner.

1. Can they make effective repair attempts after an argument?

Unless your arguing is particularly contemptuous (eye rolling, calling each other "nuts" etc.), whether you argue is not as important as whether you and your mate can effectively repair your bond and sense of trust after arguing.

2. Do they lose control of their actions?

Do they put their fists through walls? Do they spend money you can't afford?

Especially if you're going to have children with someone, you'll want to know that your potential co-parent is reliable and isn't going to be violent or cruel in front of your child/ren.

3. Can they persist through frustration?

When they're working on a task or project, do they quit as soon as they hit a difficult point or are they willing to persist through frustration.

4. Are they willing to discuss difficult topics?

When you need to discuss a difficult topic do they refuse to talk (termed stonewalling)? Do they duck, dive, and weave away from tough topics e.g., they tell you they'll talk about it at some later point and then avoid?

5. Can they delay gratification?

Do you think they would've passed the marshmallow test as a child? The ability to pass the marshmallow test is predictive of later success

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QX_oy9614HQ

6. Are they able to admit mistakes or acknowledge their role in a problem?

Are they so defensive they can't admit mistakes?

7. Can they identify "soft emotions?" (e.g., feeling sad, lonely, anxious)

When someone isn't able to identify specific emotions it makes it difficult for them to communicate what they're feeling or recognize what types of support someone else needs.

8. Are they self-absorbed?

Are they able to shift their focus away from themselves long enough to take an interest in your inner experience (your thoughts and feelings?)

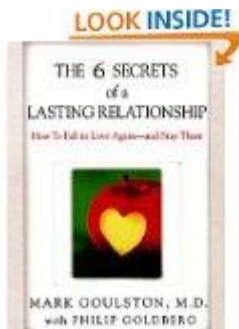
9. Are they supportive of your successes?

When something goes right for you, does your partner seem to care?

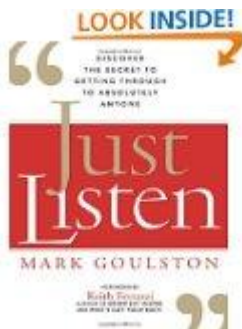
10. Do they know how to boost their own mood?

Do they know how to deal with their own [stress](#) in effective ways? Do they know how to maintain a positive mood e.g., Do they regularly schedule mood boosting activities such as seeing friends (or whatever is important to them)?

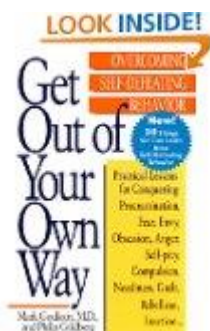
RECOMMENDED BOOKS from Kathleen:



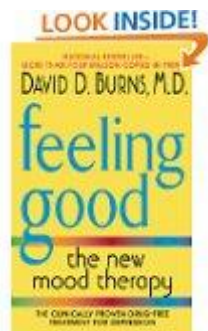
[The 6 Secrets of a Lasting Relationship](#) by Goulston, Mark and Goldberg, Philip (2001)



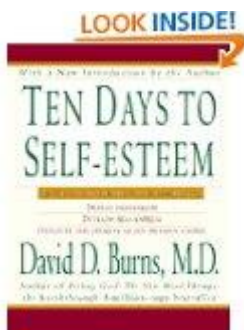
[Just Listen: Discover the Secret to Getting Through to Absolutely Anyone](#) by Goulston, Mark (2009)



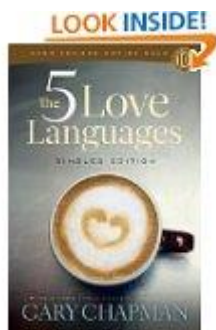
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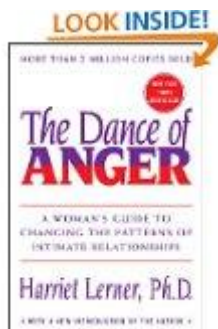
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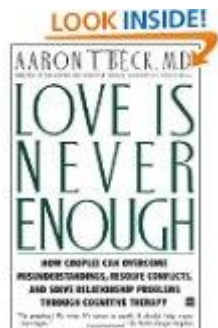
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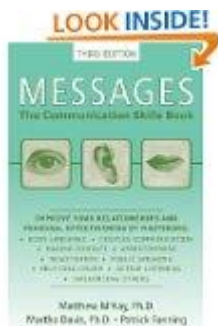
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[The Dance of Anger: A Woman's Guide to Changing the Patterns of Intimate Relationships](#) by Lerner, Harriet (2014)



[Love Is Never Enough: How Couples Can Overcome Misunderstanding](#) by Beck M.D., Aaron T. (2010)



[Messages: The Communication Skills Book](#) by Matthew McKay, Martha Davis and Patrick Fanning (2009)

Five Languages of Love Personal Profile: www.5lovelanguages.com



LOVE LANGUAGES PERSONAL PROFILE



FOR SINGLES

To Get Started:

The profile consists of 30 pairs of statements. Circle the one statement in each pair that best represents your desire or preference. Once you've made your selections, go back and count the number of times you circled each individual letter and write in the appropriate blank at the end of the profile.

The **5** Love Languages

- 1 A I like to receive notes of affirmation.
E I like to be hugged.

- 2 B I like to spend one-to-one time with a person who is special to me.
D I feel loved when someone gives practical help to me.

- 3 C I like it when people give me gifts.
B I like leisurely visits with friends and loved ones.

- 4 D I feel loved when people do things to help me.
E I feel loved when people touch me.

- 5 E I feel loved when someone I love or admire puts his or her arm around me.
C I feel loved when I receive a gift from someone I love or admire.

- 6 B I like to go places with friends and loved ones.
E I like to high-five or hold hands with people who are special to me.

- 7 C Visible symbols of love (gifts) are very important to me.
A I feel loved when people affirm me.

- 8 E I like to sit close to people whom I enjoy being around.
A I like for people to tell me I am attractive/handsome.

- 9 B I like to spend time with friends and loved ones.
C I like to receive little gifts from friends and loved ones.

- 10 A Words of acceptance are important to me.
D I know someone loves me when he or she helps me.

- 11 B I like being together and doing things with friends and loved ones.
A I like it when kind words are spoken to me.

- 12 D What someone does affects me more than what he or she says.
E Hugs make me feel connected and valued.

- 13 A I value praise and try to avoid criticism.
C Several small gifts mean more to me than one large gift.

- 14 B I feel close to someone when we are talking or doing something together.
E I feel closer to friends and loved ones when they touch me often.

- 15 A I like for people to compliment my achievements.
D I know people love me when they do things for me that they don't enjoy doing.

- 16 E I like to be touched as friends and loved ones walk by.
B I like it when people listen to me and show genuine interest in what I am saying.

NEXT



LOVE LANGUAGES PERSONAL PROFILE



FOR SINGLES

17 **D** I feel loved when friends and loved ones help me with jobs or projects.
C I really enjoy receiving gifts from friends and loved ones.

18 **A** I like for people to compliment my appearance.
B I feel loved when people take time to understand my feelings.

19 **E** I feel secure when a special person is touching me.
D Acts of service make me feel loved.

20 **D** I appreciate the many things that special people do for me.
C I like receiving gifts that special people make for me.

21 **B** I really enjoy the feeling I get when someone gives me undivided attention.
D I really enjoy the feeling I get when someone does some act of service for me.

22 **C** I feel loved when a person celebrates my birthday with a gift.
A I feel loved when a person celebrates my birthday with meaningful words.

23 **C** I know a person is thinking of me when he or she gives me a gift.
D I feel loved when a person helps with my chores.

24 **B** I appreciate it when someone listens patiently and doesn't interrupt me.
C I appreciate it when someone remembers special days with a gift.

25 **D** I like knowing loved ones are concerned enough to help with my daily tasks.
B I enjoy extended trips with someone who is special to me.

26 **E** I enjoy kissing or being kissed by people with whom I am close.
C Receiving a gift given for no special reason excites me.

27 **A** I like to be told that I am appreciated.
B I like for a person to look at me when we are talking.

28 **C** Gifts from a friend or loved one are always special to me.
E I feel good when a friend or loved one touches me.

29 **D** I feel loved when a person enthusiastically does some task I have requested.
A I feel loved when I am told how much I am appreciated.

30 **E** I need to be touched every day.
A I need words of affirmation daily.

Excerpted from *The Five Love Languages, Singles Edition* ©2009. Reproduction and distribution for use, personal and/or professional (workshops, organizations, churches, nonprofits, small groups, etc.), are permitted provided the profiles are distributed free of charge.

RESULTS

A: _____ WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

B: _____ QUALITY TIME

C: _____ RECEIVING GIFTS

D: _____ ACTS OF SERVICE

E: _____ PHYSICAL TOUCH

Which love language received the highest score?

This is your primary love language. If point totals for two love languages are equal, you are "bilingual" and have two primary love languages. And, if you have a secondary love language, or one that is close in score to your primary love language, this means that both expressions of love are important to you. The highest possible score for any single love language is 12.

Would you like an email copy of your results?

Take the free quiz online at 5lovelanguages.com and get your personal results emailed directly to your inbox.

Want to learn more?

Visit 5lovelanguages.com and sign up for Dr. Gary Chapman's FREE eNewsletter.



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